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Crabs

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MAURA STANTON was born in 1946 in Minneapolis. She received an M.F.A. from Iowa in 1971, and currently teaches writing at the University of Richmond. Her poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *Poetry Northwest*, *The New Yorker* and many other magazines.

THE FIRST CHILD

I grow dumb: the snow crops
pine from the hill until only dark
bark flaws the white everywhere.
This is nowhere. The child knuckled
in my belly is no one, a muscle,
a blind fish nervous at its hook.
Each day it devours my speech
until I dream, *surely I am a fish
beached somewhere on an iceberg.*
This isn't love. My husband
keeps his hands away, quoting
statistics: the trauma of young
wives in their first pregnancy.
He thinks I match some percent,
that I won't jab our baby with long
hatpins or feed it ammonia.
Doesn't he see how it puffs
within me, trying to get out?
How it nibbles my brain?
I want him to understand
how frost comes: to see white
fear wall me in like a glacier—
& see this child at my eyes
cracking its way to air.

CRABS

The new in-laws steam crabs
for my wedding, the aunts mumbling
how many kids can cram at her breasts?
Trapped in the crab-pot, red claws
clamp on each other's eyes for safety.

All night I hear that dance, the flesh
blistering white under the blue shell-bone.
Surely I ate their poison, that forbidden
membrane caging the sweet meat.
Sleeping, my husband belongs to these ladies
who root in my belly, tongs flashing,
tongues bitter with the need for children.
They admire my skin. I see it peel off:
My lip will fall that way; the nose-bone
grub forward. My great-grandmother's
casket photograph showed a woman's chin
caved-in like tub lard. Tonight the mirror
is precise. I imagine everything, me, hare-lipped,
earless, a thousand maggots at the brain.

IN IGNORANT CADENCE

The chemical tapestry of your brain
amazes the heart of you,
all those ions & neural protons

clicking into scenes or wishes.
Your tongue is alive
in your mouth like a slippery fish

so why can't you say anything?
Even Philomela, throat staunched with rags,
managed to shred her weaving fingers

until the thread equaled
recklessness from once upon a time.
The tongue of a bird is a delicacy—

yours, a distraction you never understood,
a hopeless slab of muscle
forever wobbling on the edge of song.